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LETTER

Edward Long Fox, M. D.

EVERY man who brings himself forward as the champion of a combination or party as You, Sir, have lately done, commits himself to the judgment of the public, and must doubtless expect to have his conduct investigated and his motives scrutinized. Whilst you profess commiseration, moderation, and justice, you call upon the Citizens of Bristol in a way calculated to mislead their judgment, inflame their passions, and excite their resentment. In the present state of things to what good end can this tend? Can it possibly, Sir, have any consequences which will not be injurious to the peace of society; and at the same time pernicious to the authority of the laws of your country? The inhabitants of Britain, naturally endowed with much feeling, have at all times been prone to enthusiastic delusions: hence crafty and designing men have found ample scope to work upon their passions for the accomplishment of particular ends. Furnished, as we unfortunately are, with too many proofs that this foe to human happiness has never been more predominant among us than at the present moment, it behoves us to guard against its baneful workings, by regarding with a jealous eye every attempt to rouse our feelings. Little, Sir, is required to enrage a multitude, but

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much is requisite to direct the operations of an enraged multitude to any good ends. Attend first to your relative situation in society; examine your own mind, and then determine whether you have sufficient influence, authority, or abilities to stay the mad career of a thoughtless populace. It would perhaps be paving to the inhabitants of Bristol a compliment which human nature does not admit, to suppose in so large a mass of people, there may not be a considerable number so void either of principle or reflexion, as to rank confusion and riot among the good things of this life. Upon the minds of such right and wrong can have no influence; dupes to their own vices and passions, they become the ready agents of designing and discontented men. You cannot be ignorant, Sir, how much more even the best of us are apt to be governed by passion than reason, neither can you be ignorant how much more of passion than of reason falls to the lot of the lower ranks in every society. To prevent this prevalence of passion over reason in a misguided populace, would indeed be truly benevolent and humane; this would in truth constitute you the friend to the poor, and as the promoter of peace, it would entitle you to the highest and best reward.

The manner, however, in which you would attempt the redress of what you conceive grievances, leaves us little room to hope these considerations will have much influence upon your mind; but the sober and reflecting part of the Citizens will no doubt enquire into your motives before they submit themselves to the guidance of your opinions. The nature and drift of your conduct since your settlement in this City, from the

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period Animal Magnetism, to your present appearance in the little Sulky, has been to court popularity even by the affectation of singularity. This consideration will necessarily lead to the conclusion, that your present conduct has in it more of selfish policy than of real humanity and benevolence. The tendency of your political opinions is well known, and it is equally well known, for it is woefully exemplified in France, what are the objects of such opinions. That every man has a right to his opinions is both true and just, but how far he may proceed to act in pursuance of those opinions, can only be determined by the laws of his country. Peace, it will be said, and the preservation of Liberty, are the grand objects of your present pursuit; objects lovely, indeed, in themselves, and well calculated to captivate minds unaccustomed to consider motives and to weigh consequences. But the merit of your conduct in this must be determined by the principles upon which you act. Can Peace with France be an object of such importance to this country, as to be worth the risk of war at home? Can Liberty be endangered by curbing Licentiousness.

PAX QUÆRITUR BELLO, was Cromwell's favorite maxim; and however unwilling the democratical factions of the present day may be to allow the Ministry the privilege of adopting it, they are nevertheless both willing and ready to make it the rule of their own conduct. For it is possible, Sir, to preach peace in a way to promote war, and war of the most horrible kind; war which shall tear inunder the bonds of society and dissolve all our tender and natural affections, when humanity, benevolence, charity, religion, all shall

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stagnate at the heart, and the hand of the parent be ultimately dyed in the blood of the child, and the hand of the child in the blood of the parent. The possibility alone of such an evil ought to keep us perpetually on our guard; and how much more strongly ought the probability of it to determine us to watch every motion of a desperate faction, of whose designs we have something indeed a little less than legal proof, but certainly a little more than mere suspicion.

That the "fairest pretexts are ever thrown over the foulest designs," is an apothegm too true to be doubted; and "a man without honor or conscience will always feign the warmest attachment to any principles, provided his hypocrisy promises to give him importance, and to promote his interest. Hence the most abandoned of wretches are always the most forward to volunteer their vigilance in a time of public alarm."* How completely this reasoning recoils upon your party will easily be seen by the recollection of a few circumstances. Previous to the last public meeting, the destruction of the Bill of Rights, and the consequent loss of Liberty, were sedulously represented as sufficient causes of public alarm; and the Citizens were called upon in the most passionate and determined manner, to assemble in defence of this palladium of Liberty. In such a state of public alarm, those who were most forward to volunteer their vigilance, must undoubtedly, according to the foregoing reasoning, be the most abandoned of wretches. Who those were let the world judge.

Whatever professions, Sir, may issue from the party to which you are attached, the public are in possession of

* The Bill of Rights against the Gagging Bills.

of too many facts to doubt their real inclination and intention. Neither attachment to the Constitution; loyalty to the King, or love of justice, but the total subversion of the established Government, and the removal of all restraints, form the grand outlines of all their projects. For what attachment to the Constitution can men have who notoriously cherish Republican principles! what loyalty towards the King can men feel who are desirous of exciting his subjects to rebellion! or lastly, what regard can men have for justice or morality, who openly scoff at religion!

An arrogant opinion of mental superiority constitutes the most striking characteristic of your party. Let it be so, Sir; we want not the instrumentality of deep reasoning to find out the paths to happiness and peace. Common sense will sufficiently enable us to discriminate between that just and necessary restraint which constitutes Civil Liberty; and that total contempt of all moral and legal restraint which constitutes licentiousness. Common sense tells us Civil War is the severest affliction which can beset any nation; and lastly, Common Sense will convince us that the only way to avert such an evil, is to support at the present moment the constitutional government of our country, and to quarrel against the arts of Republicans and Levellers. The Citizens of Bristol, whether "unfeeling, daftardly, nor inconsiderate," will still, I trust, have more spirit and prudence than to suffer a few factious Aliens to scatter among them the seeds of discord and sedition. They will naturally enquire, Sir, whether your party possesses any exclusive privilege of judging right, and should they determine in the negative, they will

will then enquire likewise whether many of their respectable fellow Citizens, having extensive connexions and much property among them, may not be at least as much in the right, and feel at the same time more real interest for their happiness and peace. However ignorant we may be imagined, we have sense enough to know that the leaders of Opposition in Parliament, and the leaders of Opposition out of Parliament, have perfectly distinct views : the first are in their hearts determined Royalists, and would be, if once admitted into power, zealous supporters of Government ; the latter are for the most part Republicans and Reformers, and consequently enemies to the Establishment ; we know therefore nothing could induce these parties to co-operate but the hope that each might be rendered serviceable to the other for the accomplishment of their particular views. By similar artifices, and for the same purposes, both these parties strain every nerve to alienate the minds and hearts of the people from their King and government, well knowing without affecting this, and setting their passions afloat, they stand little chance of moulding them to their purposes, and consequently all their ambitious and destructive projects must fall to the ground, like the baseless fabric of a vision. Sensible also of the strong attachment of the people to freedom, they unite in affecting an extraordinary zeal, at the present awful crisis, for the cause of Liberty, and represent the total loss of this great boon as the certain consequence of the present attempts to infringe the right of assembling to petition. But if to assemble in order to petition the Legislature without control upon the manner and the object, be a

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valuable privilege, it surely loses much of its value, when both the manner and the object tend to destroy the Legislature itself. " Reason and prudence forbid us to pursue a good that must certainly be attended with more considerable evil, but we may be allowed to bear with an evil from whence a greater good must arise." That the right of assembling under the present temper and circumstances of the times is a good which has every appearance of being attended with considerable evil to society, no cool and dispassionate mind can doubt; and that we ought rather to bear with the evil of having this right controled in order that greater good may follow, reason as well as prudence, strongly urge.

It can hardly be questioned, Sir, that an obstinate adherence to principles, though a good general rule, may in some cases be productive of much mischief, and ought then to be violated. Lord Clarendon has, I think, illustrated this by two striking instances, which occurred during the great fire in London; when the Mayor proposed pulling down a house in order to interrupt the progress of the fire, he was opposed by the Lawyers, who declared the act unlawful; the house was consequently burnt, and the fire proceeded; during the same conflagration it was also proposed to break open some houses in the Temple, in order to save the furniture; but the owners being then in the country, it was declared burglary to force open a door without their consent, and the fire was suffered to destroy both houses and furniture. Though the principle here acted upon is founded upon one of our dearest rights (the sacred right of property as it is properly termed)

termed), can any one deny it might and ought to have been violated in these instances to prevent the extension of mischiefs already oppressive? Such absurd conclusions against common sense, will I trust, Sir, find few advocates among us at the present time. Where is the man who could think himself injured by a violation of this his most sacred right, if by such procedure a magistrate could snatch from the flames a part only of his property? Why then should we feel any reluctance to have our right to assemble and petition controled, if by such temporary control we can save from ruin and devastation the old family Mansion, under whose roof we and our property have hitherto received comfort and protection.

After a due consideration of all circumstances, it is our sincere wish, Sir, to be left to the quiet and peaceable operation of our common sense upon our common feelings, that uninfluenced by any impracticable political refinements, we may coolly and dispassionately balance between the good and the evil of the present measures, and stedfastly support such as seem to us best calculated to secure the internal peace of our country, upon which alone everything valuable to us as men and Christians, must at the present moment depend.

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BRISTOL, DEC. 11, 1795.